



**Louisiana Office of Public Health
Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Section**

Phone: 1-800-256-2748

www.oph.dhh.state.la.us

Influenza or the Flu

What are the signs of flu?

If you have the flu, you will have a sudden headache and dry cough, and you might have a runny nose and a sore throat. Your muscles will ache, you will be extremely tired, and you can have a fever up to 104°F (40°C). Most people feel better in a couple of days, but the tiredness and cough can last for two weeks or longer.

The flu is a respiratory (breathing) illness. You cannot have a "stomach flu." Symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting are uncommon with the flu, except in very young children. Check with your healthcare professional if you have questions about the diagnosis and treatment of these illnesses.

Diagnosis and testing for flu

Typical influenza (flu) symptoms include fever, body aches, tiredness, cough, and sometimes a sore throat and runny nose. However, these can be symptoms of many diseases, and it can be difficult to tell if you have the flu or another illness by looking at the symptoms alone.

You can be tested for flu. Most of these tests involve having your throat or nose swabbed. This means that the infected area will be wiped with an absorbent material that is then sent to a laboratory for analysis. This type of test is used in the first three to four days of your illness.

Flu tests are not 100 percent accurate. Because the tests are sometimes incorrectly negative or incorrectly positive, they should not be used routinely. Your doctor can determine if you need to be tested for flu; these tests are most useful when a doctor needs the results to help with diagnosis and treatment decisions. For example, if there is an outbreak of a respiratory (breathing) illness, the flu tests can help doctors tell if the illness affecting the population is actually the flu or something else.

Children's Flu Symptoms

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association, school-age children are particularly at risk. The flu is highly contagious and can spread by air droplets from sneezes or coughs and by unwashed hands. During any flu outbreak, as many as 40% of school-age children can become infected with the flu.

Children have many typical symptoms:

Cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, fever

Chills, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, loss of appetite

Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. (Adults typically don't have these symptoms, and if they do, it's a stomach virus, not the flu.)

If Your Child Has the Flu

Bed rest at home and plenty of fluids are usually all that children need. Talk to your doctor before giving children any non-prescription decongestants, since many children are sensitive to their ingredients. If your child can tolerate them, encourage fluids and soft foods to prevent dehydration.

Important: Never give aspirin or aspirin-containing products to children under age 20, doctors advise. Aspirin has been linked with Reye's syndrome, which can cause permanent brain damage if not caught early.

What are the complications of the flu in children?

Most healthy children recover from flu without any problem. Fever and many flu symptoms usually last only two to four days. However, cough and weakness may linger for up to two weeks.

The types of complications that can develop from flu: ear infection, sinus problems, or pneumonia. In rare cases, flu can affect muscles -- including the muscular wall of the heart -- and the nervous system.

When to call a doctor?

Call a doctor if your child has:

- Signs of dehydration, like dry mouth and dark-yellow urine
- Sore throat that keeps him or her from eating or drinking
- Seizures
- An earache
- A cough that produces discolored mucus
- Breathing difficulty
- Decreased alertness

When is the flu season?

Flu epidemics in Louisiana generally peak in January or February and last until April -- so stay on guard for flu symptoms.

People can die from the flu

The flu is a highly infectious disease of the lungs, and it can lead to pneumonia. Each year about 1,000 people die because of the flu or pneumonia in Louisiana alone. Most who die are 65 years and older. However children younger than 2 years old are as likely as those over 65 to have to go to the hospital because of the flu.

The Flu Vaccine

Why should you get the flu vaccine

The flu vaccine is valuable as the best prevention against influenza and its severe complications, including pneumonia, hospitalization, and death. Complications from flu most often occur among those older than 65 years of age, those not yet 65 years of age who have certain medical conditions, and children younger than 2 years of age. Influenza vaccination is recommended or encouraged for these groups and their close contacts and for others including all persons 50 years of age and over (people in this age group are likely to have at least one high-risk condition), healthcare workers, household contacts of high-risk persons

Flu vaccine and lung disease

Flu vaccine is your best protection against flu and its complications. People who suffer from asthma, lung disease, or other respiratory conditions should get vaccinated.

Who should get the flu vaccine

Adults and children with conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and kidney disease need to get the flu vaccine. And people who are active and healthy can also benefit from the protection the flu vaccine offers.

High Risk of Severe Illness

- ▶ 65 years old or older
- ▶ Children 6 - 23 months old
- ▶ Adults and children with chronic health conditions
- ▶ More than 3 months pregnant during the flu season

Close Contacts of People at High Risk of Severe Illness

- ▶ Household member or caregiver for someone at high risk
- ▶ Healthcare workers
- ▶ Household member or caregiver for children under 2 years old

Healthy People 50-64 Years Old

Anyone Who Wants to Prevent the Flu

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), in conjunction with the CDC, is now recommending that **even healthy babies** be given the flu vaccine to prevent potential complications

When to get the vaccine ?

Flu vaccine can be given before or during the flu season. While the best time to get the flu vaccine is October or November, getting vaccinated in December or later can still protect you against the flu.

Will "early" flu vaccination protect you all season?

For most people, October and November are considered the best time to vaccinate

October and November might seem "early" in the season, but vaccinating at this time provides the best protection throughout the flu season. This time period for vaccination is recommended because this timing protects most people during the expected periods for peak flu activity.

If you get the flu vaccine, you can still get a mild case of the flu

The vaccine usually protects most people from the flu. Sometimes a person who receives flu vaccine can get the flu, but it will frequently be milder than without the vaccine. Flu vaccine will **not** protect you from other viruses that sometimes feel like the flu.

The vaccine has mild side effects

The worst side effect you're likely to get with injectable vaccine is a sore arm. The risk of allergic reaction to flu vaccine is far less than the risk of severe complications from flu itself.

What if you react to the flu shot?

The **flu shot** uses an inactivated or "killed" vaccine. This vaccine **CANNOT** give you the flu. However, flu vaccine, like other vaccines, can occasionally cause a reaction. Feeling some response to the shot is not unusual. The vaccine acts to stimulate your immune system and prepare you to resist infection. You may feel your body's protective activity through mild symptoms. Also, some people may experience symptoms of mild sickness after getting a flu shot, but these symptoms are not necessarily connected to the shot.

If you do experience a reaction to the flu shot, it is usually local and mild—redness, soreness, and swelling at the site of the injection. Usually if you have this kind of reaction you find that it doesn't interfere with normal daily activity and does not make you feel sick. Fever and more generalized aches and pains can occur but are even less likely; those who are receiving the vaccine for the first time ever are most likely to have this type of reaction. You feel the symptoms, if any, within a few hours of the injection. The symptoms typically cause discomfort, not sickness, and last for a day or two.

Treating a Mild Reaction

To treat a mild reaction to the flu vaccine, use over-the-counter medication only for the symptoms you have (fever, swelling, nasal congestion, cough, and aches and pains). **Do not give aspirin to children**; use another medication to relieve their fever or aches and pains. If fever is high or symptoms persist or are severe, talk to your doctor or healthcare professional.

There are very FEW reasons not to take the flu vaccine

You might not be able to get this protection if you are allergic to eggs (used in making the injectable vaccine), are very sick with a high fever, or have had a severe reaction to the flu vaccine in the past.

Nasal-spray flu vaccine (FluMist™)

The nasal-spray flu vaccine is approved for vaccinating healthy people aged 5 to 49 years and is a useful alternative flu protection for those who find the flu shot frightening or painful. This vaccine may cause nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat, and cough--symptoms of a cold. Mild reactions to the nasal mist vaccine are not unexpected and should be brief.

Other Flu-like illnesses (ILI)

During the fall and winter flu season, many other infectious agents circulate and cause influenza-like illness. Influenza and influenza-like illness have similar symptoms and may be difficult to distinguish initially. Flu and influenza-like illness are characterized by fever, body aches, and headaches.

Colds and the flu

Influenza (flu) and a cold are both respiratory (breathing) system infections caused by viruses. Initial symptoms of flu and colds are similar, and it can sometimes be difficult to tell if you have the flu or a very bad cold. The flu can cause more serious illness than a common cold.

Colds usually begin slowly, two to three days after infection by the virus, and normally last only two to seven days. A bad cold can last up to two weeks, but this is unusual. You will first notice a scratchy, sore throat, followed by sneezing and a runny nose. You may get a mild cough several days later. Adults and older children usually don't have a fever, but if they do, it will be very mild. Infants and young children, however, sometimes run temperatures up to 102°F (39°C).

Avoiding Flu and Colds

- Clean hands with soap and water or with an alcohol based cleaner
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze in your sleeve
- After cough or sneezing clean hands with soap and water or with an alcohol based cleaner